

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I seek the assistance of Allâh the Beneficent Creator the Merciful bounty giver.

CHAPTER 1

Al-Fâtiḥah: The Opening

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 7 verses)

The *Fâtiḥah* or the *Opening* is known under various other names. It is spoken of as the *Seven Oft-repeated Verses* in the Qur'ân itself (15:87), because its seven verses are constantly repeated by every Muslim in his prayers. It is spoken of as the *Fâtiḥah al-Kitâb* or the *Opening of the Book* in a saying of the Holy Prophet, in which it is said that “no prayer is complete without the recitation of *Fâtiḥah al-Kitâb*” (Bukḥârî¹ 10:95). Hence it is also called *Sûrat al-Ṣalât*, i.e. the *chapter of Prayer*, being essential to every prayer whether performed in congregation or in private. It is also called *Sûrat al-Du‘â*, i.e., the *chapter of Supplication*, because the entire chapter is a supplication or a prayer to the Great Master. It is also known as *Umm al-Kitâb*, i.e., the *Basis of the Book*, because it contains the whole of the Qur'ân as it were in a nutshell. Some of the other names given to this chapter are *the Praise, the Thanksgiving, the Foundation, the Treasure, the Whole, the Sufficient, the Healer and the Healing*.

Al-Fâtiḥah contains seven verses in a single section, and was revealed at Makkah, being without doubt one of the earliest revelations. It is a fact that the *Fâtiḥah* formed an essential part of the Muslim prayers from the earliest days when the Muslims began to pray, and there is a vast mass of evidence showing that this happened very early after the Prophet's Call. For not only is the fact referred to in the earliest revelations, such as the 73rd chapter, but there are also

1 : About the Ḥadîth books we want to make it absolutely clear that it do not take preference over the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân. It is also not a Divine source. The mere-fact that it was written long after the demise of the Holy Prophet, and that his companions were also long dead before the time of its recording, makes it similar to any of the history books. Therefore, whenever we refer to it, it must be seen in that light.

other historical incidents showing that prayer was observed by the earliest Muslim converts.

The chapter is headed by the words *Bi-smi-llâh al-Rahmân al-Rahîm*, which also head every one of the other 113 chapters of the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân with the exception of one only, the ninth, while the same sentence occurs once in the middle of a chapter, viz., in 27:30, thus occurring 114 times in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân. The phrase has besides acquired such a wide usage among the Muslims that it is the first thing which a Muslim child learns, and in his everyday affairs the *Bismillâh* is the first word which a Muslim utters.

The *Bismillâh* is the quintessence of the chapter *Fâtihah*, in the same manner as the latter is the quintessence of the Qur'ân itself. By commencing every important affair with the *Bismillâh*, the Muslim in fact shows in the midst of his everyday life affairs that the right attitude of the human mind towards the Great Mind of the universe is that it should always seek a support in the Mighty One Who is the Source of all strength; and Faith in Allâh, thus, finds expression in the practical life of a Muslim in a manner unapproached anywhere else in the history of human devotional life.

The *Fâtihah* has a special importance as a prayer. Its oft-repeated seven verses constitute the prayer for guidance of every Muslim at least thirty-two times a day, and therefore it has a much greater importance for him than the Lord's Prayer for a Christian². There is another difference, too. The latter is instructed to pray for the coming of the kingdom of Allâh, whereas the Muslim is instructed to seek for his right place in that kingdom, which had already come, the hint no doubt being that the coming of the Prophet was really the advent of the kingdom of Allâh about whose approach "Jesus" preached to his followers (according to the

2 : What we need to make very clear is that whenever we refer to any verse of the Holy man-made reconstructed Bible, whether it is from the Old Testament or the New Testament, it does not mean that we attach any divine significance to it. The following quotation will make the subject clear: **"Bible, Manuscripts of the.** Copies of the Biblical text, written by hand. The text of the Bible has been handed down to us through handwritten and printed copies of the original writings and through translations into various ancient and modern languages. **None of the original manuscripts written by the inspired authors themselves (autographs) is known to exist**, but there are many ancient copies of the originals." [Our emphases] (J. P. O'Connell, et al. The Holy Family Bible Holy Family Edition of the Catholic Bible, from a Practical Dictionary of Biblical and General Catholic Information, Virtue and Company Limited: London, 1959, p. 30.)

reconstructed book of Mark 1:15). The prayer contained in this chapter is the sublimest of all the prayers that exist in any devotional systems, and occupies the first place among all the prayers contained in the Qur'ân itself. A chorus of praise has gone forth for it from the greatest detractors of the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân. The entire chapter is composed of seven verses, the first three of which speak of the four chief Divine attributes, viz., providence, beneficence, mercy and requital, thus giving expression to the grandeur and praise of the Divine Being, and the last three lay open before the Great Maker the earnest desire of the human being's *nafs*³ to walk in righteousness without stumbling on either side, while the middle one is expressive of the human being's entire dependence on Allâh. The attributes referred to are those which disclose Allâh's all-encompassing beneficence and care, and His unbounded love for all of His creatures, and the ideal to which the *nafs* is made to aspire is the highest to which a human being can rise to the path of righteousness, the path of grace, and the path in which there is no stumbling. Thus, on the one hand, the narrow views that the Divine Being was the Lord of a particular nation are swept off before the mention of His equal providence and equal love for all humankind, nay for all the creatures that exist in all the worlds, and, on the other, the *nafs* is made to aspire to the great devotional eminence to which arose those to whom Allâh was gracious, the prophets, the truthful, the faithful and the righteous (4:69). One would in vain turn over the pages of sacred books to find anything approaching the grand and sublime ideas contained in this chapter of the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân.

As I have said, the *Fâtihah* is the quintessence of the whole of the Qur'ân. For the Qur'ân is a book which declares the glory of Allâh and teaches the right

3 : The word *nafs* is used in the language of the Arabs in two ways, one of which is your saying *kharajat nafsu-hû* where by *nafs* is implied *the inner self* and according to the other use the significance of *nafs* is *the whole of a thing, and its essence*". It is in this latter sense that the creation of mates is spoken of in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, and hence the correct rendering of *nafs* on such occasions is *kind*, which implies *the essence*. This is made clear in 16:72: "And Allâh has made wives for you *from among yourselves*" (Ar. *min anfusi-kum*), i.e. of the same kind and essence as you are. Some commentators have taken this to be the significance, i.e. *He created its mate of the same kind* (*Baḥr al-Muḥîṭ* (Commentary), by Imâm Athîr al-Dîn Abû 'Abd Allâh Abû Ḥayyân al-Undlusî - and *Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî). Hasan also explains the words as meaning *of the same kind* (*Baḥr al-Muḥîṭ* (Commentary), by Imâm Athîr al-Dîn Abû 'Abd Allâh Abû Ḥayyân al-Undlusî on 7:189). How the first human being was created is not stated in the Qur'ân. In modern terminology it would mean the DNA as that is the *real essence* of a human being.

way to human beings, and both these themes find full expression in the *Fâtihah*. The fundamental principles of faith, the prime attributes of the Divine Being, which are the basis of all other attributes, the relation which ought to hold between human beings and their Creator, are all contained in their essence in the seven short sentences of which this wonderful chapter is made up. And to crown all, this chapter opens with the broadest possible conception of the Lordship of the Divine Being and the brotherhood of human beings, nay of the oneness of all creation, for the unity of the creation necessarily follows the unity of the Creator.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I^a seek the assistance of Allâh^b the Beneficent Creator the Merciful^c bounty giver

- 1 Praise be to Allâh, the *Rabb*^a of the worlds,^b
- 2 The Beneficent, the Merciful,
- 3 Master^a of the day of Requit.^b
- 4 You do we serve and You do we beseech for help.^a
- 5 Guide us on^a the right path,
- 6 The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favours,^a
- 7 Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.^a

a. We shall not retain the ordinary translation of the particle *bâ*, because the reader must understand that the sense of this particle is not the same in Arabic as the sense of the word *in* the equivalent phrase *in the name of Allâh*. *In*, in the latter case, signifies *on account of*, whereas the *bâ* in Arabic signifies *by*, or *through*, or, to be more exact, *with the assistance of*. The phrase is in fact equivalent to: *I seek the assistance of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful*. Hence it is therefore that a Muslim is required to begin every important affair with *Bismillâh*.

b. *Allâh*, according to the most correct of the opinions respecting it, is a proper name applied to *the Being Who exists necessarily by Himself, comprising all the attributes of perfection* (*Tâj al-‘Arûs* (Dictionary), by *Imâm Muhibb al-Dîn Abu-l-Faid Murtaḍâ* - *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane), the *al* being *inseparable from it, not derived* (*Al-Misbâḥ al-Munîr fî Gharîb al-Sharḥ al-Kabîr*

(Dictionary), by Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Muqrī al-Fayūmī - *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). *Al-ilah* is a different word, and *Allāh* is not a contraction of *al-ilah*. The word *Allāh* is not applied to any being except the only true Creator, and comprises all the excellent names, and the Arabs never gave the name *Allāh* to any of their numerous idols. Hence, as being the proper name of the Divine Being and not having any equivalent in any other language, I have adopted the original word in this translation.

c. Rahmān and *Rahīm* are both derived from *rahmat*, signifying *tenderness requiring the exercise of beneficence* (*Al-Mufradāt fī Ḡharīb al-Qur’ān* (Dictionary of Qur’ān), by Shāikh Abu-l-Qāsim Al-Ḥusain al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī), and thus comprising the ideas of *love* and *mercy*. *Al-Rahmān* and *al-Rahīm* are both active participle nouns of different measures denoting intensiveness of significance, the former being of the measure of *fa’lān* and indicating the greatest preponderance of the quality of mercy, and the latter being of the measure of *fa’īl* and being expressive of a constant repetition and manifestation of the attribute (*Bahr al-Muhīt* (Commentary), by Imām Athīr al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Abū Ḥayyān al-Undlusī). The Prophet is reported to have said: “*Al-Rahmān* is the Beneficent Creator Whose love and mercy are manifested in the creation of this world, and *al-Rahīm* is the Merciful Creator Whose love and mercy are manifested in the state that comes after” (*Bahr al-Muhīt* (Commentary), by Imām Athīr al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Abū Ḥayyān al-Undlusī), i.e. in the consequences of the deeds of men. Thus the former is expressive of the utmost degree of love and generosity, the latter of unbounded and constant favour and mercy. Lexicologists agree in holding that the former includes both the believer and the unbeliever for its objects, while the latter relates specially to the believer (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). Hence I render *al-Rahmān* as meaning the *Beneficent*, because the idea of doing good is predominant in it, though I must admit that the English language lacks an equivalent of *al-Rahmān*.

1a. The Arabic word *Rabb* conveys not only the idea of *fostering*, *bringing-up*, or *nourishing* but also that of *regulating*, *completing* and *accomplishing* (*Tâj al-‘Arūs*

(Dictionary), by Imâm Muḥibb al-Dîn Abu-l-Faïḍ Murtaḍâ - *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane), i.e., of the evolution of things from the crudest state to that of the highest perfection. According to *Al-Mufradât fî Ḡharîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by Shaiḵh Abu-l-Qâsim Al-Ḥusain al-Râghib al-Isfahânî, *Rabb* signifies *the fostering of a thing in such a manner as to make it attain one condition after another until it reaches its goal of completion*. Hence *Rabb* is the Author of all existence, Who has not only given to the whole creation its means of nourishment but has also beforehand ordained for each a sphere of capacity and within that sphere provided the means by which it continues to attain gradually to its goal of perfection. By the use of the word *Rabb* the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân thus hints at the law of evolution which is working in the universe. There is no single word in English carrying the significance of the word *Rabb* — *Nourisher unto perfection* would be nearest. *Rabb* or *Nourisher to perfection*, however, includes both the physical and devotional sides so far as human beings are concerned, His Word being the devotional nourishment through which human beings are brought to perfection.

1b. The word translated as *worlds* is 'âlamîn, which is plural of 'âlam (from the root 'ilm, to know), indicating literally *that by means of which one knows a thing*, and hence it signifies *world* or *creation*, because by it the Creator is known. In a restricted sense it is applied to *any class or division of created beings or of mankind* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). Hence 'âlamîn has been translated as “nations” in 2:47 and elsewhere. The all-comprehensiveness of the Lordship of Allâh in the very first words of the Qur'ân is quite in consonance with the cosmopolitan nature of the religion of Islâm, which requires an admission of the truth of the prophets of all nations.

3a. English translations have usually adopted *King* as the translation of the word *Malik*, which is not correct. *Malik* and *malik* are two different words from the same root, the former signifying *master* and the latter *king*. According to the rule of forming derivations in Arabic, an additional letter (as the *alif* in *Malik*) gives the meaning a greater intensity (*Bahr al-Muḥîṭ* (Commentary), by Imâm Athîr al-Dîn Abû 'Abd Allâh Abû Ḥayyân al-Undlusî), and hence a master is more than a king. The adoption of the word *malik* or *master* is to show that Allâh is not guilty

of injustice if He forgives His servants, because He is not a mere king or a mere judge, but more properly a Master.

3b. The word *yaum* is applied in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân to any period of time, from a moment (55:29) to fifty thousand years (70:4), and may therefore indicate an indefinitely small or indefinitely large space of time. According to *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane, *yaum is a time, whether day or night, time absolutely, whether night or not, little or not; also a day, meaning the period from the rising of the sun to its setting.* According to *Al-Mufradât fî Gharîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by Shaikh Abu-l-Qâsim Al-Husain al-Râghib al-Isfahânî, the word *yaum* indicates a *period of time, whatever period it may be*, and this is the proper signification. As there are ample indications in the Qur'ân that the Divine law of requital is working every moment, and there is nothing to support the idea that it will not come into force before a particular day, the law of requital referred to in this verse is therefore a law which is constantly at work, the day of Judgment being the day of complete manifestation of it. *Master of the day of Requital* in fact stands for *Master of the law of Requital*, as that law is working every moment.

The word *dîn* means both *requital* and *the way of life as prescribed by Allâh*, being derived from *dâna, he recompensed, judged, and obeyed* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). In describing Allâh as Master of the day of Requital, the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân lays stress, on the one hand, on the fact that the Divine law of requital of deeds is working every moment, and thus makes human beings feel the responsibility of what he or she does, and gives prominence, on the other, to the quality of forgiveness in Divine nature so that the law of requital is not like a rigid law of nature but like the dealing of a Master Who is essentially merciful, as already described. In speaking of the law of *requital* after the two great attributes of *beneficence* and *mercy*, the aim is to show that requital is as essential a Divine attribute to bring humanity to perfection as the attributes of beneficence and mercy. Beneficence is exercised towards the whole of humanity, mercy towards those who accept the Truth, and through requital are brought to perfection those who do not accept the Truth. Their punishment sometimes takes the form of distress and affliction in this life but it will receive a

final shape on the Day of Judgment. Both the afflictions of this life and the hell of the Hereafter are really remedial measures to exterminate devotional diseases, and awaken of the devotional life in human beings.

It may be further noted that Allâh may also be said to be the Master of the day of Requit, in the sense that devotional awakening will gradually be brought about in the world, so that ultimately the majority of people will recognize the truth of way of life as prescribed by Allâh. The law of evolution is, in fact, working devotionally as it is working physically in this vast creation.

4a. The first three verses of this *sûrah* speak of the grandeur of Allâh and the last three of the aspiration of human being's *nafs* to attain devotional loftiness, while this, the middle verse, speaks of the relation of the *nafs* of human beings to the Divine essence. Here the way is pointed out through which human beings can attain to real greatness. It is through '*ibâdat* of Allâh which means *obedience* (*tâ'at*) combined with complete humility (*khudû'*) (*Al-Mufradât fî Gharîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by Shaikh Abu-l-Qâsim Al-Husain al-Râghib al-Isfahânî), and through *isti'ânat*, or seeking help (*'aun*) from Allâh. The idea of '*ibâdat* (*service* or *worship*) in Islâm is not a mere declaration of the glory of Allâh it is the imbibing of Divine morals and receiving their impress through humble service to Allâh hence the prayer for Divine help.

5a. *Hidâyat* (guidance) means not only *showing the way* but also *leading one on the right way till one reaches the goal*. This is the significance here. Through Divine help human beings seeks to be guided in the right path until he or she reaches his or her goal of perfection. Human beings indeed stands in need of guidance and light from Allâh in their everyday life affairs and is therefore taught to look for light in the right direction, for light from Allâh. But he or she needs this light in a greater degree for attaining to the great devotional goal. What that goal is, is stated in the next verse.

6a. Those upon whom favors are bestowed are according to '*Abd Allâh ibn 'Abbâs* (Companion) the four classes mentioned in 4:69, viz., the prophets, the truthful, the faithful and the righteous (*Bahr al-Muhît* (Commentary), by Imâm Athîr al-Dîn Abû 'Abd Allâh Abû Hayyân al-Undlusî). It is in the footsteps of these righteous leaders of the world that the Muslim aspires to walk, the chief aim of his

or her life thus being not only his own devotional perfection but to try also, and lay down his or her very life, for the devotional perfection of others. They thus also pray for the Divine favors which were vouchsafed to the righteous in the uprooting of evil and establishing good in the world. It further shows that according to the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân the favors that were bestowed upon the prophets — the gift of Divine revelation being one of them — can still be bestowed upon the righteous who follow the right way. It should, however, be borne in mind that prophethood and revelation are two different things, because the gift of revelation was, according to the express teachings of the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, granted to others than prophets as well; as, for instance, to the mother of Mûsâ (20:38) and to the disciples of 'Îsâ (5:111). This gift of revelation or being spoken to by Allâh, according to most authentic hadîth, will be granted to the righteous among the Holy Prophet's followers — *there will be among them human beings to whom Allâh will speak though they would not be prophets* (Bukhârî 62:6).

7a. The Muslims are warned here that even after receiving Divine favors they may incur Divine displeasure and go astray from the path which leads to the goal of perfection, and this is what the prayer of v. 7 aims at. The Arabic Glorious Qur'ân speaks of the Jews as incurring Divine displeasure (2:61, 90; 3:112; 5:60) and it speaks of the Christians⁴ as having gone astray (5:77), and the Prophet is reported to have said: “Those upon whom wrath is brought down are the Jews and those who went astray are the Christians” (*Al-Jâmi' (Hadîth)*, by Abû 'Îsâ Muḥammad ibn 'Îsâ *Tirmidhî* 44:2). Of course, the words are only explanatory and do not limit the significance of the original words used. The Jews afford an example of a people failing in righteous deeds, in carrying out the essence of the doctrine while retaining the doctrine, and the Christians an example of a people corrupting the

4 : The term *Christian* or *Christians* is not a name given by the Creator. It is also not a term used in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân. What is the meaning of the Greek term “Christ” according to the New Testament? It is reported under the heading “*Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman*” that: “You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet” (Luke 7:46 New International Version). This is the meaning of “Christ” according to the New Testament, which is based on the pagan Greek religious methodology. According to the Arabic title used for 'Îsâ is *Al-Masîḥ* (Allâh is pleased with him) as used in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, and means: The one who journeys or goes about much for the sake of devotion, or as a devotee. (See the *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). Therefore, ‘*Christ*’ as defined by Christians, is also not a divine revealed name.

doctrine itself, and both these are the pitfalls of a people to whom the right direction has been pointed out. Again, the Jews and the Christians afford an example of the two extremes, the Jews rejecting 'Îsâ, a prophet of Allâh, as a liar, and doing their utmost to slay him, and the Christians raising a mortal prophet to the dignity of Godhead. The Muslims are not thus taught a prayer that they may neither fail in good deeds while retaining the letter of the law, nor corrupt the doctrine, and that they may be kept on the middle path, avoiding either extreme.